

they knock over,
as they call each other sons of bitches —
everyone running machines
or climbing stairways
or sitting at desks
around them
stopping to stare and listen waiting
to either laugh or rush in to prevent a murder,
knowing that the Lead Man and the manager
are no more sure than anyone else
whether they are joking or not.

NO GEORGE WASHINGTON

Curly holds out a time-card the supervisor gave him
and now he's doing a celebration dance
like a touchdown scorer in the end-zone,
flopping about the huge mop of Afro-like curls on his head
and saying to me,
"You know, Fred, Goodstone's TESTING me, they say I forgot
to fill out my timecard last Thursday — the Thursday I
wasn't here, remember? — and Ron says for me to fill out
this time-card so I can correct my mistake of not turning
in a card and get PAID for last Thursday ...," Curly,
giggling as his uncontrollably delighted smile begins to
make his eyes water, saying, "You know, Fred, Goodstone's
testing my MORAL FIBER ...
they're testing my INTEGRITY"
Curly dance-stepping about
knowing he need say nothing more,
knowing that I know as well as he
that Goodstone
couldn't have made a more totally misguided
strategic error.

FRUGAL

Though our supervisor
will not purchase the cutters we need to do our
jobs on our milling machines
correctly and efficiently, though
our cabinets are largely bare of any parallel bars
or vise jaws or chucks
or cutters
which would normally be available to machinists trying
to do
the best job they could,
our supervisor does
put big padlocks on all of the doors to the cabinets
and locks
on all of the gates and doors leading into our
machine shop area,

and our supervisor does issue all of us machinists keys
and makes us use them to open
the gates and doors which we are told
must be kept locked at all times,
and our supervisor does promise
to put all thieves
in jail.

When you have as little to work with as we do,
you've really got to hang on
to it.

REPRIEVE

When the final buzzer sounds
throughout building 8,
machinists jump to life
for the first time that day,
hustling in a line
to the final punching of the timeclock
to charge out the door,
legs and arms pumping and eyes brightening
as they get their circulation and alertness back
and regain full lung capacity,
breathing huge sighs of relief
as they increase speed
heading toward the guard gate
and laugh,
pointing at the speed and energy of those ahead of them,
saying things like "What drive!"
or "What initiative!"
and making jokes
about the resurrection of the
dead.

— Fred Voss

Long Beach CA